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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHISINAU 000906

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PBTS MD EU

SUBJECT: Foreign Minister Reiterates Moldova's Policy on Transnistria, EU Integration

Classified by Ambassador Asif Chaudhry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During the Ambassador's first meeting with Foreign Minister (FM) Andrei Stratan, on September 8, the Foreign Minister reiterated Moldova's well-known policy positions. Moldovan officials would discuss the Transnistria (TN) conflict with Russian officials, but any final settlement would only take place in the 5-plus-2 format. Moldova would not accept a Kozak-based settlement that allowed for a federation or for the presence of Russian troops. More than at any other time, Moldova wanted to be a member of the European Union (EU) and needed membership "perspective," Stratan asserted. He asked the U.S. to support Moldova's efforts to obtain candidate status from the EU. End summary.

Transnistria

¶2. (C) The Foreign Minister thanked the U.S. for its support on the Transnistrian frozen conflict and stated that Moldova felt U.S. and EU participation in TN talks was important. Stratan thought that the increased recent activity surrounding the TN issue was a positive development. The FM acknowledged regular discussions with Russia on a TN solution, and thought that Russia seemed interested in "coming closer to a solution." With a subtle note of defiance, Stratan added that it was important that Russian interests coincided with Moldovan interests and not vice versa. He assessed recent declarations from the Russian leadership on the Medvedev-Smirnov meeting as seemingly favorable to a TN resolution.

¶3. (C) "We will try to continue talks with the Russian Federation," he said, "avoiding federalization and a military presence." (Note: In this formulation, we assume federalization means the creation of a federation or confederal state in which Transnistria would share almost equal powers with the central government, in effect creating two states joined into one supra-state under one name. End note.) Stratan insisted that Moldova was not discussing a second version of the Kozak plan, as President Voronin told A/S Dan Fried by telephone. The FM speculated that maybe Russia hoped to show the international community that a regional conflict could be unfrozen differently than occurred in Georgia.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador stressed that the U.S. thought the 5-plus-2 format was the best way forward and that a settlement of the TN conflict should result in conditions favorable to Moldova.

European Integration

¶ 15. (C) Uppermost in Stratan's mind was Moldova's efforts to join the European Union. He reiterated Moldova's firm policy to seek EU membership and continue adjusting Moldovan laws to EU standards. The FM noted that Moldova had adopted 160 laws during the past three years to bring its legal regime to European standard. Now Moldova would finalize those legal reforms and focus on their implementation. He evaluated Moldova-EU relations as positive, noting that Moldova would soon begin negotiations with the EU on a new political document to define the next stage of the relationship.

¶ 16. (C) Moldova very much wanted the EU to grant it the status of candidate for future EU membership. Such a status would not upset European efforts; some states had been candidates for decades, Stratan pointed out. Meanwhile, candidate status would send a strong signal to those who didn't want Moldova to be a political part of the EU, he stated. (Note: The FM was alluding to Russia. In a recent conversation, Stratan asserted that Russia did not want Moldova to be an EU member, though Russia kept such a desire quiet. End note.) Stratan flatly stated that Moldova considered unacceptable the EU's grouping Moldova with Ukraine regarding EU membership. "Each

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country has its particularities. Moldova has more possibility to be an EU member state because it has more stability than Ukraine," Stratan averred.

¶ 17. (C) The FM urged the USG to support more vocally Moldova's EU aspirations. He also asked that U.S. officials tell the EU to keep the EU Border Assistance Mission in place along the Moldovan-Ukrainian border.

¶ 18. (C) The Ambassador responded that the U.S. supported Moldova's EU orientation. He noted that Moldova would be able to develop and attract Transnistrians to right-bank Moldova by improving the investment climate.

Comment

¶ 19. (C) Stratan's statements didn't break new policy ground but are notable for their consistency. Moldovan officials have repeatedly stated these positions on Transnistria and the EU. We detect a greater urgency now behind the Moldovan government's effort to obtain EU candidacy. The Georgia crisis has likely sharpened Moldovan officials' desires to gain the protection of EU membership and ward off Russian pressure. Post recommends that USG officials use every appropriate opportunity to encourage the EU to grant Moldova the status of candidate to EU membership, even if final granting of membership is years away.

Chaudhry